

# EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

ONCE YOU'VE EATEN ITALIAN PROSCIUTTO AND DRUNK ITALIAN BEER, YOU WON'T GO BACK, WRITES CANDACE SUTTON.

**T**HE PIGS OF SAN DANIELE DEL Friuli in the rolling hills of north-western Italy's province of Udine are out in the spring sunshine crunching on acorns for the future delight of your Australian table.

They are an exclusive lot, the San Daniele swine: a 50-50 cross of landrace and large white breeds, they graze on a mix of corn and flour with their oak nuts until they are nine months old and weigh a smidgin more than 160 kilograms.

Then it's down to the Levoni plant where they will be slaughtered, salted, cured, washed and hung to age for 13 months in a well-ventilated spot, a process the Levoni company says has been going on since Celtic times.

The distinctive guitar-shaped hams of reddish-pink meat with the trotter left in are Levoni's – and San Daniele del Friuli's pride and one of the two premium Italian prosciuttos sold in Australia.

The other, bearing the Parma mark, is matured in Lesignano de' Bagni (northern central Italy, west of Bologna) and processed under similarly strict conditions.

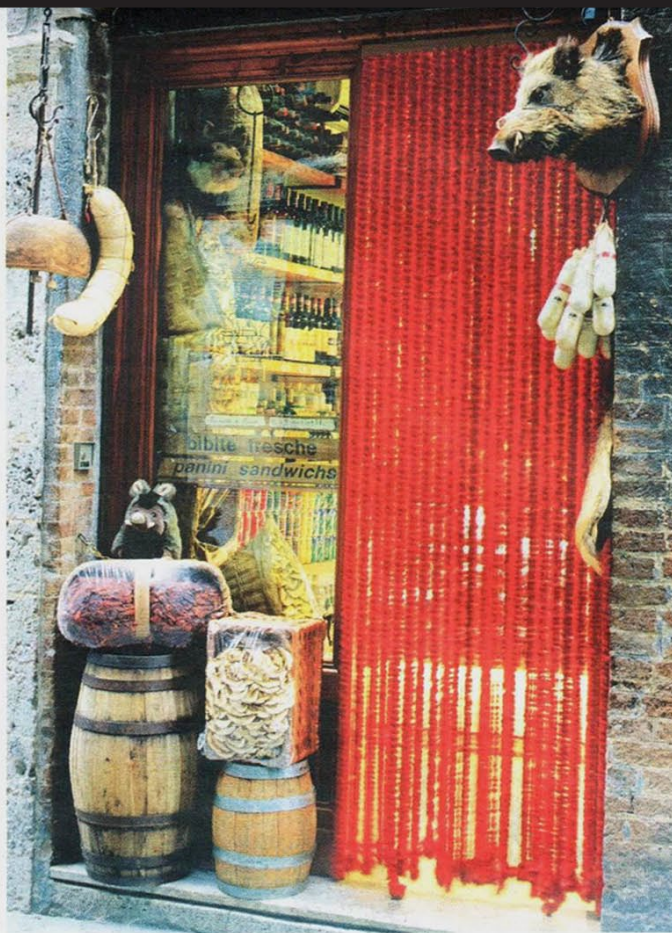
According to importer Claudio Bamonte of Quality Centre Food Services in Sydney Auburn area, Parma prosciutto is "very sweet and soft", the San Daniele drier and nutty and Bamonte's favourite.

And once you have eaten either, he says, you would never go back to Australian-produced prosciutto. "You cannot compare the taste," Bamonte says.

Down the southern end of Italy in the Campania region, tomatoes are grown by the tonne in the rich volcanic soil under blue skies (the Bay of Naples area is known as the "Sunshine State").

The famed San Marzano heirloom tomato thrives here and is considered by many chefs to be the ultimate tomato for sauces. Fleshier, with fewer seeds and less acidic than most tomatoes, it has a full-bodied flavour (check for "DOP" on the label for authenticity).

Someone as biased as Robert D'Amato of



Sweet meats ... Italy is home to some of the world's finest salami and tomatoes (far left).

GUSTO ITALIANO

## BRANDS TO WATCH

### General Produce

Peroni  
(beer)

Aperol  
(aperitif)

Campari  
(aperitif)

Ferrero  
(confectionery)

Casa Italia imported foods in Sydney will say that in a Campania tomato you can taste the Italian sun.

The D'Amato family opened their import business in 1993 and, like Quality Centre Food Services, now sell all the Italian staples plus tomatoes, coffee, sweets and Parma prosciutto to delicatessens, Harris Farm Markets and speciality food shops.

"Italian prosciutto is just a different quality [from Australian]. It has a very delicate flavour. It melts in your mouth," D'Amato says.

The D'Amatos also import balsamic vinegar from Modena and nearby Reggio Emilia in northern central Italy, where it has been made since the Middle Ages.

To whet your appetite for a meal made from Italian ingredients, an aperitif is traditional.

Served to stimulate hunger, aperitifs are made from blended herbs and spices mixed with alcohol.

One of the best-known Italian brands is Campari, whose bitter mixture of herbs and the fruit of the myrtle-leaved orange tree (or chinotto) was first brewed in 1860. Campari is often used in cocktails but just as frequently is served with soda water.

Another aperitif favourite is Aperol, which boasts ingredients including gentian, rhubarb and cinchona.

To accompany your meal, try an Italian wine, or polish it off with an Italian beer.

Australians will be familiar with Peroni, which now has a low-carbohydrate, mid-strength beer (3.5 per cent alcohol) called Peroni Leggera (pronounce le-je-ra).

Lauren Braid of Peroni Australia says the beer is an "easy-to-drink, sociable beer" which marries well with a meal of Italian produce.

Among its sweet products, Casa Italia imports a Tuscan-style nougat – hard or soft, with almonds or hazelnuts – which is high in honey content.

Also available are Masoni Panforte – cakes of various sizes – in flavours of chocolate, figs and walnut and margherita (named after the wife of Italian King Umberto I).

Made from fresh almonds, candied fruits, spices and honey in the hills of Tuscany by a family which traces a line back to the 1300s in Siena, Masoni products kept Italian soldiers alive during World War I and are classic Italian fare.

Over at Quality Centre Food Services, Claudio Bamonte has a large selection of pastries imported from Italy: an extraordinary filo pastry with sweet filling called sfogliate riccia, beautiful rich biscuits and small sfogliate filled with cream or chocolate, like chocolate croissants but tastier.

These are available at Harris Farm Markets and Norton Street Grocer in the Sydney suburbs of Bondi Junction and Leichhardt, and at restaurants such as Machiavelli.



As featured in the **May 2011** lift-out of **The Sydney Morning Herald** titled '**Gusto Italiano**' (see page 9)

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